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ABSTRACT

This newsletter, which is intended for adult literacy teachers throughout Ohio, consists of a single article: "'But What Can I Do?' Helping Victims of Domestic Violence" (Lisa Collins). The article begins with a series of statistics on domestic violence in the United States. Next, domestic violence is defined as an ongoing and often-escalating pattern of behavior in which abusers maintain control over victims through physical, sexual, emotional, or financial abuse. The three phases of the cycle of violence characterizing domestic violence (the tension-building, explosion, and honeymoon phases) are described along with the tactics that abusers generally use to maintain control over their victims. Presented next are 8 warning signs that can help teachers determine whether their students are victims of domestic violence and 14 immediate steps to help domestic violence victims in their struggle to escape being the target of partner violence. The remaining two sections of the article detail the various legal options (including three types of restraining orders) available to victims of domestic violence and guidelines for leaving abusive relationships when the abuser is still living in the victim's home and when the abuser has left the victim's home. (Contains 14 references and 3 additional resources.) (MN)

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Enhancing adult literacy in the State of Ohio

Teacher To Teacher

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"But What Can I Do?"

Helping Victims of Domestic Violence

By: Lisa Collins

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- **A woman is beaten every 15 seconds. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1983)**
- **Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between ages 15 and 44 in the United States—more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. (Uniform Crime Reports, 1991)**
- **Over 50% of all women will experience physical violence in an intimate relationship. (Largo Police Department, 1999 from Domestic Violence at Tripod)**
- **Women who leave their batterers are at a 75% greater risk of being killed by the batterer than those who stay. (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1988)**
- **Nationally, 50% of all homeless women and children are on the streets because of the violence in the home. (Senator Joseph Biden, 1991)**
- **There are nearly three times as many animal shelters in the United States than there are shelters for battered women and their children. (Violence Against Women Act, 1990)**

Today violence is everywhere. It is in the news, on our favorite television programs, in the movies, and more and more it is in our homes. We see the results everyday in our classrooms and offices. But what can we, as teachers, do to stop the violence? How can we help the victims who turn to us for guidance? You may find yourself asking, "How can I make a difference? You can do a lot. Through this publication you will not only learn the facts about domestic violence, but you will also learn how to best help your students recognize and escape violence in their personal lives. Let's start by looking at the definition of domestic violence. Domestic violence:

- is a repeated pattern of behavior in which the abuser maintains control over the victim through the use of physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, or financial abuse
- is ongoing, although there may be periods of respite
- usually escalates with time
- occurs in familial or intimate relationships in which people are living together or separately, or between people in present or former relationships
- occurs regardless of age, income, education, religion, sexual orientation, culture, or race

Cycle of Violence

Although there is no profile of a "typical battered personality," there is a well documented syndrome of what happens once the battering starts. Domestic violence often follows a set, predictable pattern. This three phase pattern is called the cycle of violence. Violence usually escalates with each revolution of the cycle and as the relationship progresses, the battering can progress from bruises and black eyes to permanent physical injury and death. During the first phase, the Tension-building phase, the victim:

- senses that the abuser is feeling tense
- feels as if she is "walking on eggshells"
- attempts to prevent the abuser's anger from escalating by complying
- may have a sense as to what will set the abuser off

While the abuser may:

- verbally abuse the victim
- hit and/or break objects
- threaten the victim

The second stage is the Explosion stage. It is during this phase that the actual battering occurs.

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When this occurs there is an uncontrollable discharge of the tensions that built up during phase one and

- the victim may be physically, sexually, and/or emotionally abused
- the victim may or may not become violent in return
- children are afraid and may hide, call the police, or try to intervene

During the final stage, the Honeymoon phase, the abuser may feel remorse for what he has done and often ask forgiveness from his victim. Often the abuser is afraid the victim will leave so makes promises to the victim to ensure that she will stay or return to the home if she left after the attack. There are several typical patterns seen during this phase. They include:

- Honeymoon Syndrome: the batterer uses bribes such as flowers if the victim stays or returns to the home
- Sugar Dad Syndrome: the batterer promises to be a great dad if the victim stays or returns home
- Revival Syndrome: the batterer promises to be saved or to go to church if the victim stays or returns to the home
- Sobriety Syndrome: the batterer promises to stop drinking if the victim stays or returns to the home (By the way, drinking does not cause beating. If it did, the batterer would hit everybody when drunk.)
- Counseling Syndrome: the batterer promises to go to counseling if the victim stays or returns to the home.

The following "Power and Control Wheel" was developed to illustrate the tactics, described by battered women, that their abusers generally use to maintain control over their victims. Feel free to use this wheel to facilitate discussions with your students.

VIOLENCE
PHYSICAL
SEXUAL
USING COERCION AND THREATS
Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her • threatening to leave her, to commit suicide, to report her to welfare • making her drop charges • making her do illegal things.
USING INTIMIDATION
Making her afraid by using looks, actions, gestures • smashing things • destroying her property • abusing pets • displaying weapons.
USING ECONOMIC ABUSE
Preventing her from getting or keeping a job • making her ask for money • giving her an allowance • taking her money • not letting her know about or have access to family income.
USING EMOTIONAL ABUSE
Putting her down • making her feel bad about herself • calling her names • making her think she's crazy • playing mind games • humiliating her • making her feel guilty.
POWER AND CONTROL
USING MALE PRIVILEGE
Treating her like a servant • making all the big decisions • acting like the "master of the castle" • being the one to define men's and women's roles
USING ISOLATION
Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, where she goes • limiting her outside involvement • using jealousy to justify actions.
USING CHILDREN
Making her feel guilty about the children • using the children to relay messages • using visitation to harass her • threatening to take the children away.
MINIMIZING, DENYING AND BLAMING
Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously • saying the abuse didn't happen • shifting responsibility for abusive behavior • saying she caused it.
PHYSICAL
VIOLENCE
SEXUAL

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DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT
202 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218.722.2781

Battered women often feel ashamed, isolated, and embarrassed. They may experience a repression of feelings and may be prevented from planning and/or acting on their own behalf due to fear of violence from their batterer. So why do battered women stay with their abusers? Among the many reasons are:

- there are few supports (shelters, family members, friends, etc.) to their leaving
- they know the difficulties of single parenting in reduced financial circumstances
- there is a mix of good times, love, and hope along with the manipulation, intimidation, and fear
- they may not know about or have access to safety and support
- they fear losing their children or being unable to protect them
- there is a realistic fear that the batterer will become more violent if they attempt to leave

Determining If What You Suspect is True

In a classroom setting it is often difficult to know whether or not a student is the victim of domestic violence. Often we may have suspicions, but do know where to look for corroborating information. While it may be difficult to make a definitive determination that somebody is in an abusive relationship simply by observing that person's behavior, in most domestic violence cases, there are warning signs that can be readily identified. Some of these warning signs include:

- secretive about home life
- partner has exclusive control over all money and household finances
- partner won't let her learn to drive, go to school, or seek employment or if she is allowed to do these things, the abuser has strict regulations about tasks the victim must complete (full course meal must be on the table at a certain time, house must always be spotless, etc.)
- often misses scheduled appointments
- speaks poorly of self
- excessive emotionalism: tearful, angry, depressed, nervous and/or confused
- unable to make eye contact, always looks away or at the ground when talking
- may or may not have visible injuries such as cuts, bruises, and/or burns, which are often explained away as "I fell" or "I'm such a klutz. I'm always bumping into things."

Immediate Ways to Help

A woman who is battered needs to know that she is not to blame for her own battering and that she does not have to take it, that she deserves to be safe and happy. She needs to know that she is worthwhile and that she can make changes in her life. If you suspect that one of your students is being abused, there are some very basic steps that can help this person in their struggle to escape being the target of partner violence.

- Know yourself and your ability/willingness to address the issue of battering
- Know the issue of domestic violence
- Talk with the woman away from her batterer as well as your colleagues, her peers and/or other students so that she feels comfortable talking about sensitive issues (if you feel uncomfortable about being the only person privy to the abuse, explain to the woman that you may want to consult with other teachers or other professionals on the best way to help in her situation)
- Approach the person in an understanding, non-blaming way
- Comfort her that she has taken a big step by putting her trust in you and that she needs to have more strength to overcome the struggle ahead (do not oversimplify by stating something to the effect that "everything is going to be all right")
- Empathize that it must be very difficult for her to talk about the abuse and that she must be frightened
- Tell her that nobody deserves this kind of treatment, to be abused, beaten or threatened and that nothing that is said or done makes this violence okay
- Share any information that you may know and/or try to find information about shelters, hotlines, police, and legal issues to share with her (much of this information can be found in the Yellow Pages of your local phone book)
- Support and listen; encourage her to express her feelings whether they be of anger, fear, or hurt
- Don't make decisions for the person, but support her when she makes a decision even if she is not ready or willing to leave the relationship yet
- Ask her if she has suffered any physical abuse and if necessary take her to the hospital to check for injuries
- Ask if she wants to report the assault to the police and then stand by her decision
- Help her develop a safety plan in case she decides she is ready to leave the relationship (remember to let her decide what is most comfortable for her in her current situation)
- Remember, you cannot make her decisions for her. You cannot make her leave him. You cannot change her mind. You can, however, make a difference by your understanding, accepting, supportive, and caring approach to her and her situation.

Legal Options

When working with victims of domestic violence, one of the most pressing concerns for the victim entails the safety of herself and of her children. Many victims do not know that they have legal options, let alone what they are. Part of our job, then, is to help educate the victim on their legal options should they decide to leave the abusive relationship. There are several legal options available to any person suffering from abuse by a present or former family or household partner, including a dating partner. The following information has been adapted, with permission, from Action Ohio and Safe Transitions.

Three types of restraining orders available in Ohio for victims of abuse:

1) Temporary Protection Order (TPO): This kind of restraining order occurs only after the offender has been arrested, criminal charges of domestic violence or a related crime are filed and he/she is being arraigned from jail. It requires the abuser to stay away from the victim until the criminal case is over. A TPO can also order an abuser not to contact the victim by phone or in writing. The abuser cannot approach the victim at work, school, or at home and cannot threaten the victim in any way. If the abuser violates this order, he/she can be arrested again.
2) Civil Protection Order (CPO): A CPO is issued by a civil court and orders the abuser to stay away from the victim. Even if criminal charges are not being filed against the abuser at the time, or if the victim has already been issued a TPO, he/she can still file for a CPO over the TPO: a) the CPO contains more detailed restrictions to the abuser, b) it can include temporary orders of custody and support of the victim's children, and c) it can remain in effect for as long as five years (as opposed to a TPO, which ends when the criminal case ends).
3) Anti-Stalker Protection Order (SPO): This type of restraining order should be requested by victims who are being abused or stalked by non-family members. An SPO orders the stalker not to contact the victim in any way.

Violation of a restraining order is a criminal offense with penalties that can include a jail term. If a protection order is violated, the victim should call the emergency police department number or 911 immediately.

Often victims are so relieved that the violent situation is over that they decide not to follow through by filing criminal charges. The belief is that the abuser will stop harassing the victim simply because of the restraining order. This is not always the case. There are advantages (fines and jail terms for the abuser) as well as disadvantages (duration of the court case and the risk of the abuser being out on bail) to filing criminal charges. Ultimately, however, the decision rests with the victim.

For further information about the legalities of leaving an abusive relationship, including an easy-to use guide to navigating through the justice system, visit the Ohio Literacy Resource Center web page at http://literacy.kent.edu/oasis/abuse/justiceguide

Leaving an Abusive Relationship

When leaving an abusive situation, a woman must consider: if the abuser has left the residence, what she needs to take when leaving, what important telephone numbers to have, if she should file for a protective order, and where she should go. The following safety plan is being used with permission from Safe Transitions.

If the abuser is still living in the victim's home, the victim should:

- pack a safety bag
- establish a code and check-in system with friends and neighbors
- get help from friends the batterer does not know
- get extra house and car keys made and keep them someplace easily accessible, but that the abuser is not aware of
- put emergency phone numbers all over the house
- program the telephone to dial emergency telephone numbers
- keep a cordless phone nearby
- make sure there is always gasoline in the car
- plan where to go in a crisis, including how to get children to a safe location
- call a local shelter or hotline program
- get out of the house and go to the hospital or a motel for safety, do not go back home to "pick up a few things"

If the abuser left the victim's home, the victim should:

- lock all windows
- call the police
- ask neighbors to call the police if they see the abuser nearby and create a code and check-in system with friends and neighbors
- have overnight guests as often as possible
- search the house for weapons the abuser may have hidden
- pack a safety bag that includes identification for self, driver's license, children's birth certificates, personal birth certificate, money, lease, rental agreement, house deed or mortgage payment book, bank books, check books, credit cards, insurance papers, keys to house, car and office, medications for self and children, small saleable objects, address book, pictures, medical records for all family members, social security cards, welfare identification, school records, work permits, green card(s), passport(s), divorce papers, jewelry, children's favorite toys and/or blankets, and items with special sentimental value
- change the locks on the house and the car
- change the phone number
- get or borrow a barking dog who can alert you if the abuser returns
- buy mace or pepper spray
- change daily routines and transportation routes
- keep a copy of any restraining order in various places
- document any and all threats

A guidebook for creating a safety plan, compliments of Perspective Family Center, is also available through the Ohio Literacy Resource Center website: http://literacy.kent.edu/oasis/abuse/justiceguide

The issue of domestic violence is all around us, but it is not always easy to recognize. We, as professionals, must not only learn to recognize it, but we must be ready to step in and take the hand of those victims who come to us for help. Saying that, however, does not mean that we will be able to save all of those who come to us in need. Many of the abused individuals we encounter will not yet be ready to break from all they have known and leave their abuser. As difficult as it may be, we must stand by these individuals, softly encouraging them, but never demanding or pushing them too hard. When they are ready to leave, they will realize that they have somebody ready to stand beside them, who will take that next step with them, who will support them if they should falter, and who will help guide them all the way to safety.

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Additional Resources for Further Reading

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